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# Security Council

Sixty-first year

*Provisional*

**5389**th meeting

Friday, 17 March 2006, 10 a.m.

New York

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| *President* | Mr. Mayoral | (Argentina) |
| *Members* | China | Mr. Wang Guangya |
| | Congo | Mr. Gayama |
| | Denmark | Ms. Løj |
| | France | Mr. De La Sabliere |
| | Ghana | Nana Effah-Apenteng |
| | Greece | Mr. Vassilakis |
| | Japan | Mr. Oshima |
| | Peru | Mr. De Rivero |
| | Qatar | Mr. Al-Nasser |
| | Russian Federation | Mr. Denisov |
| | Slovakia | Mr. Burian |
| | United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland | Sir Emyr Jones Parry |
| | United Republic of Tanzania | Mr. Mahiga |
| | United States of America | Mr. Bolton |

## Agenda

The situation in Liberia

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

06-27491 (E)

*The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.*

**Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

**The situation in Liberia**

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): Pursuant to the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I invite the representative of Liberia to participate in the consideration of the item without the right to vote, in accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

*Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of Liberia, was escorted to a seat at the Security Council table.*

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the Council, I extend a warm welcome to Her Excellency Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of Liberia.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a statement by Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of Liberia.

I now give the floor to Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of Liberia.

**President Johnson-Sirleaf** (Liberia): It is a great honour and privilege for me to address this body. My presence here is in recognition of the critical role played by the United Nations in restoring Liberia to its rightful place in the comity of peaceful nations. Allow me therefore to seize this opportunity to pay a solemn tribute and to express our deepest gratitude to the United Nations; to this body, the Security Council; and to the families of all the peacekeepers who have made important sacrifices on behalf of my country.

In providing support through its resolutions and through the statements made by the various Presidents of the Security Council during our crisis, and in defining the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), the Security Council has earned itself a laudable place in the history of Liberia. We shall remain ever grateful for that manifestation of support for and identification with a founding Member of the United Nations at its time of greatest need.

The activities of the United Nations in Liberia over the years have endeared this great Organization that promotes international peace and security to our people.

It is for these reasons that we also seize this opportunity to thank the United Nations and the Secretary-General, as well as his Special Representative to Liberia, and all who work under the umbrella of the United Nations and its agencies, for helping to stabilize the situation in Liberia and for giving our people renewed hope for the future.

I also want to express our deepest appreciation for the concerted efforts of the international community, beginning with our neighbours in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) subregion, the African Union, our partners in the European Union and the European Commission, as well as our traditional friends, such as the United States, together with other countries that are contributing troops and police for the smooth operation of UNMIL.

My inauguration on 16 January as the democratically elected President of Liberia opened up many possibilities, and I believe that this portends a brighter chapter in our country's history.

However, we also realize that there are formidable challenges ahead as we set about consolidating our hard-won peace. But with the assurances of the United Nations and of other partners, we are determined to complete the reintegration of our war-affected population, namely the refugees, the internally displaced and ex-combatants, and quickly begin to address the most basic needs of our people.

In order to meet these challenges, we have elaborated a phased plan of action that defines our immediate priorities for the first 150 days of my administration, as a prelude to a national strategy that will take us forward over the medium term.

Our strategy for peacebuilding is constructed on four pillars, focusing on security, the rule of law and governance, economic revitalization and basic services, and infrastructure. To spearhead and coordinate this effort, I have established a Liberia Reconstruction and Development Committee, which I will lead personally.

Our major partners, including the United Nations, are fully involved in the workings of this Committee.

It is imperative that we provide tangible assurances to the people of Liberia that democracy will bring change for the better. They must see early improvements in health and education and economic opportunity, starting with jobs. I will need the support of the United Nations and the international community to make the changes necessary to achieve these important national goals. On our part, we commit to continue collaboration with our international partners in the implementation of the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme. At the same time, I intend to ensure the implementation of a capacity-building programme that would enhance Liberian ownership of the programme, as well as to transfer critical skills to Liberians, to strengthen national capacity on a long-term basis.

At the moment, we are putting in place mechanisms that will enhance transparency in governance, consistent with the requirements for the lifting of timber and diamond sanctions. As a first measure, I have rendered null and void forestry concessions, as recommended by the Forestry Concessions Review Committee. My Government is meeting most of the requirements for implementing the Kimberley Process, and I hope that this will lead to an early lifting of the ban on diamond exports. New measures have been enacted to enhance national revenue flows, so that we can depend more on ourselves in the process of national reconstruction and development. My Government has also extended the life of the Governance Reform Commission and expanded its mandate to, among other things, spearhead the formulation of a vigorous anti-corruption action plan, as well as to lead in the implementation of a code of conduct governing the behaviour of officials of the three branches of Government. I have already mandated that all ministers make a public declaration of personal assets.

I am aware that Liberia, as a nation, must confront the legacy of the past to enable us to go forward in the future. The conflict touched virtually every family and every individual in our land. We are determined to address issues from our painful past, including the question of impunity, as well as the imperatives of national reconciliation, so that the country can move ahead. For this reason, we have established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as mandated by the Accra Peace Accord. We have also reconstituted our Supreme Court to start the long-needed reform of the judiciary branch of Government.

An issue of major concern to our people and the nations of the subregion has to do with a case of former President Charles Taylor, who is presently in exile in Nigeria. I have asked the President of Nigeria to consult with colleagues in the subregion and in the international community on the resolution of this issue, in conformity with the requirements of the United Nations and the international community. I have also asked that, as we bring this matter to closure, we ensure that in any proceedings there is an environment that protects the fundamental human rights of all, including the accused. In rising to all these challenges, our nation will continue to count on the unstinting assistance of the United Nations and the international community.

Liberia is still a fragile State. Our peace remains fragile. Our armed forces are being reconstituted, and the restructuring of our police and security forces is not yet complete. In view of these realities, I urge the Council to maintain its support for the United Nations Mission in Liberia. We must consolidate the gains achieved during the transition of the last two years so that the enormous investment made by the international community in the peace and stability of Liberia and the region is not put at risk. We must be assured that the United Nations will ensure the safety of our people and the stability of the State if the African leadership decides to bring the Taylor matter to successful closure.

I also seek the urgent contributions of donor countries and organizations for our recovery and development agenda, including debt relief. Many countries have already contributed significantly, especially in the areas of humanitarian aid and security sector reform. If we are to achieve the sustainable development of Liberia that will guarantee continued peace and stability, it is important that we accelerate the transition from humanitarian to development assistance, so that we can tackle the fundamental problems of reducing poverty and making significant progress in the achievement of the other Millennium Development Goals.

Let me conclude by once again thanking the Security Council for its tremendous support to the Liberian people. I am convinced that, working closely

together, we shall help Liberia turn its back on a tragic era and put our country firmly on the path to recovery, to development and to enduring peace.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of Liberia. I think the Council's applause attests to the support of the United Nations, not only in the past, but also for the future of democracy in Liberia.

I shall now call on Council members who would like to address President Johnson-Sirleaf.

**Nana Effah-Apenteng** (Ghana): It is with great pleasure that my delegation joins others in welcoming Her Excellency Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia. We equally appreciate her statement and share many of the aspirations and concerns that have been raised, especially with regard to the formidable challenges of national reconstruction and reconciliation. Indeed, Liberia has come a long way in the quest for peace, and its people deserve commendation for their resolve in recent years to stay the course. That was clearly demonstrated in the successful completion of the two-year transition process as set out under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement drawn up at Accra.

Naturally, in this new climate of hope, expectations are high, not least among the most vulnerable segments of the population, who continue to bear the brunt of the acute humanitarian and socio-economic crisis of a war-shattered economy.

Undoubtedly, President Johnson-Sirleaf has an onerous responsibility to discharge, since her beloved country, Liberia, is, in many respects, starting from scratch on many fronts. In that regard, we wish to note that the country's security situation remains fragile, not to mention the other serious challenges — particularly the urgent need for the consolidation of State authority and the firm establishment of the rule of law and good governance throughout the country. These constitute the foundation on which a strong economy can be built in order to tackle expeditiously the formidable humanitarian and socio-economic problems that President Johnson-Sirleaf's Government faces.

We recognize that the Government and the people of Liberia bear primary responsibility for the reconstruction and development of their country. Nonetheless, the magnitude and complexity of the challenges facing Liberia call for the continued support and cooperation of the international community and of the United Nations system as a whole, especially during this critical period of transition from war to peace. That will enable the leaders to build on the gains made so far and will stimulate the rapid economic growth that is vital for sound nation-building.

We expect the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) to contribute greatly towards that end. Therefore its continued presence in the country — at least in the foreseeable future — is necessary. Let us learn from history and not betray the people of Liberia again in their hour of need. In the light of the goodwill that Liberia currently enjoys on the international plane, we hope that, sooner rather than later, the country will benefit from the assistance and support of the newly established Peacebuilding Commission.

It is also with humility that I deem it appropriate to remind President Johnson-Sirleaf that, because she is Africa's first female President, history has thrust upon her the additional burden of being a trailblazer for the numerous women and girls of Africa in their quest for empowerment through active and meaningful participation in national politics, including in leadership roles. We are confident that, given her sterling qualities and pedigree, she will live up to their expectations and set an example worthy of emulation.

I need not dwell at length on the long history of excellent relations between our two countries. Suffice it to say that Ghana will continue to use its tenure of office in this organ as well as its membership of our two common institutions — the Economic Community of West African States and the African Union — to support the implementation and attainment of President Johnson-Sirleaf's laudable vision. Her success is our success, and we wish her well.

**Mr. Gayama** (Congo) (*spoke in French*): It is a great pleasure and a great honour for my delegation to welcome Her Excellency Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia. Today, the Council has the privilege of honouring the first woman democratically elected as a head of State in Africa.

Indeed, the election of Mrs. Johnson-Sirleaf is a symbol that reflects the African continent's gradual and solid rooting in modernity, which some have called Africa's renaissance. This election represents a living expression of the influence of African women on the future of our societies. It is also a reflection of the end

of the 14-year-long civil war that completely destroyed this country — a country that was one of the hopes of our continent. Above all, the election confirms a country's ability to emerge from war once there is determination on the part of competent authorities, steadfast involvement of the African community and mobilization of international partners.

The success of the electoral process is due mainly to the Liberian people, whose maturity we should commend, as well as all those actors in political and social life who have made a positive contribution to the management of this process with a sense of responsibility and loyalty to the Republic. I also wish to pay tribute to Mr. Charles Gyude Bryant for the effectiveness with which he led Liberia's National Transitional Government.

The new President of Liberia was elected primarily for her unanimously recognized merits and for the hopes raised by her political agenda, which she has just presented to us admirably. In fact, the President is a competent individual who has held senior ministerial posts in her country and senior posts in several international institutions, including, inter alia, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. She has known the agony of war and even of exile. For us, this is an opportunity to express our admiration for her exceptional journey and her ceaseless fight for justice and dignity.

President Johnson-Sirleaf was elected not because she is a woman, but for her political commitment and her professional experience — guarantees of success in a context of major challenges following a long and terrible civil war. My delegation is convinced that her great experience and the high esteem in which she is held at the international level will help her to fulfil her mission of leading the Liberian nation towards long-term peace and stability. The President also embodies the hope of aimless young people, who for too long have been immersed in violence, that they can now commit themselves to turning away from armed groups and becoming involved in the development process.

The events experienced by Liberia in recent years shed light on the problems faced by developing countries, particularly in Africa: those of promoting peace and security, which are prerequisites for any kind of development. It has been a tragic experience that should challenge us all. First, it challenges all citizens, particularly the political class, regarding their contribution to the search for long-term solutions. Such solutions can come only if people cooperate and listen to one another, but in a calm atmosphere, refusing to use violence, defy the laws of the Republic or become consumed by partisan passions.

That is why we commend President Johnson-Sirleaf's willingness to reach out to her former opponents in order to work together and, above all, to help give priority to the national reconciliation that is essential to the stability and development of the beautiful country of Liberia.

My delegation supports Mrs. Johnson-Sirleaf in her plea to establish a truth and reconciliation commission, as has been done in several other African countries. Such an initiative would undoubtedly help to heal the wounds of Liberians and to build national unity, which is essential for the country's reconstruction.

If it is to deal with the many challenges facing it, the Liberian Government must, inter alia, restructure the security sector; improve economic governance; consolidate the rule of law, human rights protection and State authority throughout the country; and re-establish essential services. My delegation thus calls upon the international community to provide greater long-term assistance to the Liberian Government — beginning with maintaining the United Nations Mission in Liberia, as the President just requested — so that it can consolidate its authority, begin the necessary structural reforms and provide basic services to its people.

I conclude by expressing once again to the President of Liberia our warm congratulations and our best wishes for success in carrying out her high responsibilities as the head of her country. The vibrant and warm tribute paid to her by her peers at the African Union summit in Khartoum in January spoke eloquently of the trust that she enjoys in Africa and of the hopes placed in her to rehabilitate her country.

**Mr. Mahiga** (United Republic of Tanzania): We welcome and congratulate Her Excellency Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf on her election as President of the Republic of Liberia. Her assumption of the leadership of Liberia is the dawning of a new era for Africa and for Liberia after more than a decade of violent conflict.

While celebrating her victory, we are mindful of the major challenges facing her new Administration. First and foremost among those is to lay a stable foundation for a new Liberia emerging from civil wars, anarchy and suffering — which has affected every family in Liberia. A firm and stable foundation will be built by addressing a number of priorities. Among them are working towards national reconciliation, strengthening security, building administrative and judicial institutions, restoring law and order, creating an effective programme for the reintegration and rehabilitation of ex-combatants, fighting impunity and rebuilding mutual trust and national esteem among the Liberian people. In that regard, we are encouraged by President Johnson-Sirleaf's resolve to address the long-standing issue of Charles Taylor.

We equally strongly support President Johnson-Sirleaf's commitment to promote national reconciliation. We therefore welcome the inauguration of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which will provide an important forum for establishing a record of past abuses and determining how to deal with them. Over the years of civil conflict, Liberia produced one of the highest ratios of refugees and internally displaced persons in Africa. The return of displaced persons ought to be integral to the reconstruction and reconciliation strategies.

The international community has to remain focused to assist Liberia in its priority areas of political stabilization, economic and social reconstruction and good governance.

Lastly, we pay tribute to the men and women serving with the United Nations and to the members of the Economic Community of West African States for their tireless efforts and sacrifices to help Liberia emerge from its 15-year-old crisis, which has finally come to an end.

**Mr. Bolton** (United States of America): I wish the members of the Council a happy Saint Patrick's Day. I am sure all members are familiar with the famous American saying: Today we are all Irish.

We warmly welcome President Johnson-Sirleaf to New York and to the United States. We also join others in thanking her for coming here to address the Security Council.

For some years now we, together with the international community, have paid very careful attention to the challenges of restoring peace and stability in Liberia. Given the severity of its troubles, we have monitored events in Liberia with concern and apprehension. We have also done so with hope and anticipation that Liberia would prove to be the model of a nation beset with overwhelming problems that can and will recover.

There is no question that Liberia's problems remain enormous. But we are encouraged by signs that Liberia is on the path of recovery and reform. All of us want to be part of that success story. If committed to a reformist path, Liberia can feel confident that the international community will be there to help. For our part, the United States pledges our support to assist with Liberia's reconstruction.

The elections that took place in Liberia last fall seem likely to be marked by history as a critical milestone on the road to recovery. We congratulate President Johnson-Sirleaf on her victory. In her short time in office, we have been impressed with the courage and determination she has already shown in addressing Liberia's challenges, especially in such areas as economic and civil service reform.

On Wednesday, President Johnson-Sirleaf addressed a joint session of the United States Congress, and our Congressmen were most impressed: they gave her a standing ovation. I only regret that in our more solemn and restrained practices in the Security Council, we could not do the same for her here today. By all accounts it was her expressed commitment to create a better future for Liberia that so inspired her audience in our Congress. The United States shares that hope. We encourage the President to do all she can to sustain Liberia's forward momentum of recent months. We are confident that the President's Government will engage in sound financial management and full transparency, which are essential to spur that momentum.

We also commend President Johnson-Sirleaf's commitments to reforming the diamond and timber sectors. We look forward to the day that Liberia fulfils the requirements for the lifting of sanctions. As many know, the United States is assisting Liberia's efforts to reconstruct its forest sector on a transparent and sustainable basis. We applaud President Johnson-Sirleaf's adoption of an executive order cancelling existing forest concessions and establishing a forest-reform monitoring committee. We hope our optimism

is warranted and that remaining reforms will be in place so that sanctions can be lifted as soon as possible.

Lastly, the United States was encouraged about reports that President Johnson-Sirleaf and Nigerian President Obasanjo are discussing the issue of former Liberian President Charles Taylor, who faces multiple charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity at the Special Court for Sierra Leone. We support the efforts of President Johnson-Sirleaf and President Obasanjo and other African leaders to bring Charles Taylor to justice.

**Sir Emyr Jones Parry** (United Kingdom): I thank President Johnson-Sirleaf for honouring the Security Council with her presence here today, and for her stirring presentation this morning. Allow me also to welcome her back to the United Nations, which she served with such distinction earlier. I also wish to congratulate her on being Africa's first female leader. As our colleague from Ghana has said, what she has blazed is a path of inspiration for many, not just in Liberia but across the continent. Unfortunately, that adds to her many responsibilities. That much is clear, because if we know one thing about conflict, it is that women are the ones who suffer most and that the empowerment of women — and what we set out in the Council in resolution 1325 (2000) — is really very crucial. We therefore wish her every success in all possible directions.

Those who were on the Security Council's mission to Liberia in June 2003 need no reminding of the problems that Liberia faces. The President faces the challenge of rebuilding her country after years of conflict, an enormous task in every sense. But I think that all of us want to send today a message of clear support, not just of the Council but of the entire United Nations, for the reconstruction of Liberia. In terms of its security, the humanitarian and economic development and especially the political processes, we stand foursquare with Liberia. Let there be no doubt at all in that regard. Liberia deserves it, Africa and West Africa need it, and the United Nations must be able to demonstrate success for what it has already invested and what more it should invest in that country.

President Johnson-Sirleaf has set out the steps that she has already taken. We can only congratulate her on that and admire the rapidity with which she has done many of those things, especially in relation, if I may say so, to Government contracts and the whole question of the forestry concessions. I think we heard what she said about the Kimberly Process. That is very much key to lifting the sanctions on diamonds. I think it is incumbent upon us now to review the sanctions as quickly as possible, taking into account the steps that the President has taken.

But she has also shown, if I may say so, particular courage in her approach to the Nigerian President, the question of the return of Charles Taylor to face justice and the challenges against him, a case of the gravest of human rights abuses and war crimes. The United Kingdom is strongly of the view that he should be facing those charges, ending impunity, in the Special Court in Sierra Leone at the earliest possible opportunity. We applaud President Johnson-Sirleaf for the stand she has taken there, and I think we and, again, all parts of the United Nations have to give her every support in what is not an easy issue. We understand that, but I hope very much that the regional leaders will rally to what she is trying to do.

As she has said, the situation in Liberia remains fragile. The security situation is difficult. The urgent need to handle ex-combatants and to put in place their disarmament, demobilization and, above all, reintegration is very difficult, as is the training of the Liberian national police. All that has to be accelerated. A number of our countries are trying to help bilaterally, but the onus is clear.

But UNMIL cannot cut and run. President Johnson-Sirleaf said that she needs UNMIL to continue. I think our commitment must be clear — it must stay for as long as it is necessary to do the job and until the indigenous security forces, police and military, can take on that responsibility. That is the pledge that, I think, we have to make very clear to the President today. The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) has also, with the other forces in West Africa, to take account of all the regional aspects so that we are not actually transferring problems from one country to another, but are working on the widest possible basis. UNMIL, I am sure, will be able to stay and will cope with the situation. That requires, too, the quick-reaction force component, and the effort of our Irish and Swedish colleagues there is particularly important.

May I end simply by saying that we congratulate President Johnson-Sirleaf and admire what she is

doing. We look forward to what she will do. We wish her every success, and I think we have to underline the commitment of the Council and the United Nations to seeing it through with her to the end she wants for her people.

**Mr. Wang Guangya** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, let me once again congratulate Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf on her election to the presidency of Liberia. I also thank her for her important statement.

In recent times, the new administration of Liberia has taken a series of reform measures in all areas in its tireless effort towards economic reconstruction and national rehabilitation, and has achieved positive progress. That represents a victory for the Liberian people and the United Nations. As a friend of Liberia, the Chinese Government and people are sincerely pleased by that success. We also believe that, under the leadership of President Johnson-Sirleaf, all the parties of Liberia will unite and achieve the lasting peace and economic revitalization of their country in rapid course.

China has always supported and appreciated the positive role played by the United Nations, and especially the United Nations Mission in Liberia, in maintaining the stability of Liberia and in development. Following the establishment of the new administration, the United Nations and the international community should continue to assist the new Government in its efforts towards national reconciliation. China will always support and participate in the work in that field.

**Ms. Løj** (Denmark): I, too, would like warmly to welcome President Johnson-Sirleaf to the Council. Her presence among us today as the democratically elected President of Liberia is proof that, after a long night's travel, morning has finally broken in her country.

My message today is one of full support for the new Liberian Government. We are determined to work with it to consolidate peace and democratic processes in Liberia. It is our clear position that the United Nations Mission in Liberia should continue its robust presence in the foreseeable future in order to guarantee a secure and stable environment as the Government strives to implement urgently needed reforms and to tackle issues of impunity and justice.

Denmark appreciates the fact that important and bold steps have already been taken in key reform areas, including financial management, anti-corruption, and the cancellation of Government contracts and forestry concessions. The proper implementation of the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme will help sustain those new policies.

Both in my national capacity and as Chairman of the sanctions Committee, I welcome the President's resolve to work towards meeting the conditions for terminating the Council's measures on timber and diamonds. I assure her that we share the same interest in terminating those measures as soon as possible when the conditions are met and the revenues from those sectors will benefit the Liberian people. If the current reform momentum is kept up, that goal should be within short reach.

The sanctions Committee stands ready to cooperate with the Government on how, alongside Member States, it might assist President Johnson-Sirleaf in expediting the efforts needed to meet the conditions, as well as on how the Committee might assist her in the implementation of the assets freeze imposed by Security Council resolution 1532 (2004).

Let me finally welcome the President's request to African partners to consult on the resolution of the Taylor issue, in conformity with the requirements of the United Nations and the international community. We know that it has been a difficult decision, but also a courageous and timely one. We hope that the consultations will be brought to a speedy conclusion, as bringing an end to impunity is key to long-term stability in Sierra Leone, Liberia and, indeed, in the whole subregion.

**Mr. Oshima** (Japan): I join in warmly welcoming President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf to this Chamber. On behalf of the Government of Japan, I wish to extend once again our sincere congratulations to the President of the Republic of Liberia on her inauguration.

We trust that, in meeting the many daunting challenges Liberia faces in overcoming the legacies of the decade-long civil war, the Government and people of Liberia will be united under the leadership of the President and will make every effort to consolidate the hard-won peace and move steadfastly towards its recovery, reconstruction, national reconciliation and a new nation-building effort.

To support that national effort, the international community must respond, not only with good will, but also by mobilizing substantial support for and assistance to Liberia. For its part, the Security Council will have to address such matters as the future activities of the United Nations Mission in Liberia, the lifting of the sanctions and the issue of impunity, in close consultation with the new Government.

As the special envoy of Prime Minister Koizumi, Mr. Shintaro Ito, already conveyed in January, Japan, as a friend of Liberia and of Africa, will be pleased to join in accelerated and sustained international cooperation for Liberia as it embarks on a new journey. We will be working in partnership and solidarity with the Government and people of Liberia, including for community-based development, the reintegration of child soldiers, anti-proliferation of small arms, and other reconstruction and development projects. It is the hope of my Government that friendship between our two countries will be strengthened through close dialogue and cooperation with the President, the Government and the people of Liberia.

We wish the President and people of Liberia well with their success and we wish them a better future.

**Mr. Burian** (Slovakia): We are very pleased to welcome President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf to the Council. Slovakia would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Liberia and its people on the successful conclusion of the transitional process, and most notably on the peaceful and democratic conduct of the elections.

We applaud Liberia's progress in recent months. The country, which was perceived as one of the world's most fragile and vulnerable just a few moths ago, is today being praised as an example of a successful transition.

However, we want to underline the fact that democratic elections are just the first step, though extremely important. To make the positive developments sustainable and stable, further decisions and measures to strengthen democratic institutions and good governance are needed. The major challenges were very clearly described in President Johnson-Sirleaf's statement and we have been impressed indeed by her courage and resolution during the first weeks of her presidency to implement important steps to further the process of stabilization and reconciliation in Liberia.

Slovakia considers ending impunity to be a major challenge and imperative in all conflicts. We believe that surrendering Mr. Charles Taylor to the Special Court for Sierra Leone would be a major step for Liberia on its way towards lasting peace and national reconciliation. In that context, Slovakia welcomes the announcement of the beginning of discussions between the Governments of Liberia and Nigeria that could bring the issue of Mr. Charles Taylor to a timely resolution.

In conclusion, for our part, we would like to express our full support for Liberia on its new way towards stability, security and prosperity. We believe Liberia will continue to be a much-needed good example in the extremely volatile region of West Africa. Slovakia is ready to support the legitimate expectations of that country here in the Security Council, as well as in other international forums.

**Mr. De La Sablière** (France) (*spoke in French*): It is an honour for the Security Council to welcome Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf today. The presence of the Liberian President is the focal point of our meeting and highlights its importance.

In various ways, she embodies hope reborn — first, because she is the first woman to be elected head of State in Africa in full respect for democratic principles, and secondly, because her election marks the end of a civil war that ravaged her country and destabilized the entire subregion. Her election demonstrates that the crises on the continent — even when they achieve extreme intensity — are not necessarily fatal. It confirms that, even in such extremity, an African State can emerge from civil war when its leaders are determined, when the African community is resolutely involved, and when its international partners, beginning with the Security Council, assume their full responsibilities. Finally, her determination, competence and pragmatism are the best guarantors for Liberia's recovery.

We are all well aware of the fact that the President's job is immense. It involves rebuilding the nation, restoring basic public services, ensuring respect for the rules of good governance, eradicating corruption, achieving success in the national reconciliation process, and fighting impunity. In that respect, my country welcomes the ongoing discussions with President Obasanjo on sending Charles Taylor to the Special Court for Sierra Leone as soon as possible.

Along with those considerable challenges, there is also a fragile and unstable regional environment, as reflected in Liberia's neighbour, Côte d'Ivoire, and in particular the western part of that country that borders Liberia. The stability of the entire subregion should be a constant concern and a common objective for us all.

President Johnson-Sirleaf can count on the support of France and, as she heard our colleagues say, on the Security Council to assist her in her promising efforts. We are at her side and her success will also be the success of the people of Liberia.

**Mr. De Rivero** (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): Peru welcomes Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of Liberia, and congratulates her on having restored democracy in her country and on her election as the first woman President of an African country.

Her election as President of Liberia is a demonstration of the progress that can be achieved when the international community works in unison in the context of respect for human rights and democracy. Her democratic election in a post-conflict situation is of far-reaching importance, not just to Liberia, but also to all of Africa and the entire international community.

I congratulate her once again on having established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission and restructured her country's Supreme Court. We believe that the success of democracy in Liberia commits us to ensuring the viability of her country. The holding of elections should be just one phase in a wide-ranging programme or compact for the rebuilding of Liberia, involving cooperation on security, the rule of law, governance and economic recovery. In the economic sphere, the sanctions need to be lifted, much more economic assistance must be forthcoming, debts forgiven, and foreign investment attracted so as to promote trade in Liberia.

Peru supports the Secretary-General's proposal to extend the presence of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) until 31 March 2007, without prejudice to an assessment of further extensions, as circumstances may warrant.

In conclusion, I wish to say that Peru once again reaffirms its strongest support for Liberia and will continue to participate by providing military personnel to UNMIL.

**Mr. Denisov** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): At the outset, I wish to welcome President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the first woman in Liberia to assume such a senior post following free and democratic elections.

The Government of National Unity has achieved truly significant success in strengthening the country's unity and overcoming the consequences of the lengthy conflict there. However, much remains to be done to ensure the irreversibility of achievements in the peace process, to rebuild the war-torn and shattered country, to reconstruct the economy and infrastructure and to restore and consolidate legitimacy, law and order.

Without effective assistance on the part of the international community, including the donor countries and the development partners, and without the firm political support of the Security Council, it will be extremely difficult to resolve those issues, although the fate of the country is naturally in the hands of the Liberians themselves.

In conclusion, I should like to express our full support for the efforts of the new Government of Liberia and for Mrs. Johnson-Sirleaf personally. We are certain that, in the near future, life in Liberia will return to normal and that the country will embark on the path of sustainable development and prosperity.

**Mr. Al-Nasser** (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to welcome the presence of Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf here today. We are pleased indeed at the success story of the Security Council and the international community in the restoration of peace to West Africa. It is our hope that Liberia will be an example to be followed in that region with regard to peace processes.

We welcome the presence among us of the African continent's first elected woman President and the first Liberian head of State to have been elected since the civil war ended in 2003. Mrs. Johnson-Sirleaf was elected through fair and transparent elections that put an end to the transition period in Liberia. She is indeed a living example of the important role of women in the processes of political decision-making, peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

The devastation wrought by the destructive civil war in that country makes it incumbent upon us to consider ways and means of assisting the Liberian people, who have suffered so much in the recent past. In that regard, we call on the donor countries to support the efforts of Mrs. Johnson-Sirleaf in

combating corruption and in the reconstruction of the infrastructure in Liberia, which has gone beyond the stage of peacekeeping to that of peacebuilding.

The State of Qatar appreciates the efforts of the United Nations and of the international community in Liberia, in particular those of the United Nations Mission in Liberia, whose role has been vital in the establishment of peace in Liberia, which will have a positive impact on the West African region as a whole. I should like to wish every success to President Johnson-Sirleaf and to her friendly country.

**Mr. Vassilakis** (Greece): Let me join others in welcoming Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf to New York and in expressing our warmest congratulations to her on her assumption of the presidency of Liberia.

The recent elections held there and her victory signal the successful completion of the transitional process and a turning point in the country's history, as well as a symbol and a vindication of the sacrifices, the struggle and the contributions of all Liberian and other African women.

President Johnson-Sirleaf's determination to promote national reconciliation, political inclusion, sustainable development and economic governance reforms, as well as her qualifications and international credentials, guarantee the success of her efforts.

We would like also to commend the progress made in implementing the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme and hope to see Liberia soon assuming full ownership of it.

The Government of Liberia has undertaken the tremendous and difficult task of rebuilding and uniting the country, but in doing so it is also seeking justice and making efforts to address impunity. In that regard, we welcome the statement made earlier this week that the Governments of Liberia and of Nigeria are determined and committed to arriving at a solution to the issue involving Mr. Charles Taylor and his transfer to the Special Court of Sierra Leone, while at the same time guaranteeing his rights under international law.

Moreover, we welcome the inauguration of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, since we believe that through its work justice will be served and those who committed atrocities held accountable. The international community should and will stand by Liberia in this critical phase and provide all necessary support in that regard.

Greece, with all the means at its disposal, will do its share. We believe that the reconstruction of the country should be one of the first issues that the Peacebuilding Commission should deal with as soon as it becomes operational. We now have reason to hope that the dream of the country will become reality.

We wish President Johnson-Sirleaf every success in her difficult mission.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a brief statement in my national capacity.

At the outset, Madam President, I wish to join in expressing satisfaction, as other members of the Council have done, at your presence in our midst as you address the Council as Africa's first woman head of State.

After so many years of struggle and tribulation, we believe that you represent hope for the people of Liberia, for the region and the international community, which so ardently desires to see your country embark on the path of peace and sustainable development.

We would like to highlight the achievements registered by your Government over the past two months. In that context, I would underscore in particular the efforts made to combat corruption and the launching of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to investigate past human rights abuses.

We also agree with you, Madam President, that the situation in Liberia is still fragile and that much remains to be done in order to bring about peace and security. For that reason, we support the maintenance of the UNMIL mission as a precautionary measure until circumstances dictate otherwise.

As you have said, reconciliation cannot be achieved solely by legislation, nor can it be achieved merely through institutions. It needs to be driven by the efforts and commitment of all members of society. We believe, however, that, on the path to national unity and reconciliation, justice should not be sacrificed nor impunity enshrined. The victims of the grave violations of human rights that took place over so many years in Liberia deserve justice.

We in the Council welcome the talks that you are holding with the Government of Nigeria and the Governments of other neighbouring countries at the

highest level to arrive at a just and exemplary solution to the issue involving former President Charles Taylor.

We know that your task is a very difficult one. There is much that you must do, from resolving economic problems, including the problem of debt — given the difficult conditions that very often are set by international credit organizations — to giving a fresh start to a society divided and impoverished by civil war. You can count on our support and on our ardent wishes for success, but, most importantly, you can count on the support of your people. Your success will be the success of all Liberians and of Africa as a whole.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I invite Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of Liberia, to take the floor if she wishes to do so.

**President Johnson-Sirleaf**: I just once again would like to say thank you on behalf of the Liberian people for the support we have received from all of the nations represented at this table, from our neighbouring countries and from our African brothers and sisters in helping us make this transition from war to peace. I thank all of those countries that have provided peacekeeping troops and that have enabled us to reach this point of progress. I thank the many of you around this room, and the countries you represent, for supporting our development effort that has enabled us to embark upon these processes of change and transformation. And I thank you for the kind expression of continuing support that I have received from all of you this morning.

I pledge to you, on behalf of the Liberian people, that we will continue to take those measures that will enable us to pursue peace, stability and development, not only in Liberia, but also in our subregion and in Africa.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): Before adjourning the meeting, I take this opportunity to express, on behalf of the Security Council, our appreciation to the President of Liberia for having come to address the Council. I think with our applause the Council members wish her every success in her efforts to set Liberia on a clear course towards sustainable peace and development.

The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

*The meeting rose at 11.25 a.m.*